

Character Class**Ardent**

By Skip Williams



This column aims to provide players with tips on creating effective and interesting characters of various types. Whether you're a beginning player creating your very 1st character or an experienced gamer looking to put some punch into an old standby, this column is for you!



The ardent from *Complete Psionic* offers players a chance to play a deep-thinking character whose personal philosophy is so well developed that the character attains psionic powers. The class allows nearly any kind of character. An ardent can blast foes with energy attacks, be stealthy or subtly persuasive, serve as a healer or protector, or even function as a melee combatant.

Assets

When you chose an ardent, you have access to psionic powers and a few other useful abilities. Here's a brief list of things you'll have going for you when you choose an ardent --

- **Mantles:** A mantle represents a universal concept or philosophical idea that forms the basis for psionic study. A mantle includes a short list of psionic powers that are available to the ardent for his personal repertoire. A mantle also includes a granted power similar to the granted power a cleric receives from a domain.

An ardent chooses two mantles at 1st level plus an additional mantle at 2nd, 5th, 10th, and 15th level. The first two mantles are the ardent's 'primary mantles'. Most of the psionic powers an ardent chooses must be from those primary mantles -- see below for more details.

- **Good Will Saves:** An ardent uses the best progression for Will saves (see Table 3-1 in the *Player's Handbook*). This helps the ardent resist most effects that attack or fool her mind or assault her spirit, such as charms, compulsions, illusions, and fear. Ardents should also have high Wisdom scores (because Wisdom governs several aspects of their psionic powers), which improves their Will saves even more.
- **Good Armor Class:** Depending on the mantles you select, you might have access to defensive powers that improve your armor class, such as *defensive precognition*, *thicken skin*, and *deflection field*, and powers that can make foes miss, such as *concealing amphora*. You also have the ability to wear any kind of armor and use any kind of shield except a tower shield. That usually means you have an impressive Armor Class rating even without manifesting a defensive power.
- **Fair Hit Points:** Your 6-sided hit dice give you a reasonable hit point total. You can't withstand severe punishment, but few characters that share your offensive potential also share your hit points.
- **Good Attack Bonus:** An ardent's base attack bonus is +3 per four levels, which is second only to the more martial classes such as the fighter. If you decide to enter combat, you can do pretty well.

Weaknesses

The ardent's many advantages come at a price. Here are a few things to consider when thinking about an ardent character --

- **Limited Power Selection:** An ardent begins play knowing only two psionic powers, and those must be from the mantles she selected. At each level beyond 1st, an ardent can choose one additional power.
- As noted earlier, the two mantles an ardent selects at 1st level are her primary mantles. Any other mantles she selects are secondary. An ardent cannot have more psionic powers in a secondary mantle than she has in either of her primary mantles. So, the two mantles you choose at 1st level have a big impact on how your character develops. You have a limited ability to change which of your mantles are primary and secondary as you advance through the class, but doing so leaves you strongly committed to your newly designated primary mantle.
- **Low Skill Points:** At a mere two skill points per level, most ardents don't gain many skill ranks, even with quadruple skill points at 1st level.
 - **Mediocre Weapon Selection:** The ardent is proficient only with simple weaponry. The simple weapon category contains some decent weapons, but they're not the most deadly ones available.
 - **Poor Fortitude and Reflex Saves:** Ardents have the worst progression for Fortitude and Reflex (see Table 3-1 in the *Player's Handbook*). Ardents aren't likely to get out of the way when things get rough, nor can they easily shake off the effects of poisons and other things that attack their bodies.
 - **Low Mobility:** An ardent's reliance on heavy armor makes her a slow mover on the battlefield.

Playing a Classy Ardent

People who play great ardents usually keep the following in mind --

Choose Your Mantles Carefully

Don't pick a mantle lightly, especially when selecting your two primary mantles at 1st level. Start by deciding what sort of character you'd like to create. For example, if you plan to create a psionic powerhouse who can blast your party's foes, look for at least one mantle that provides you with offensive powers. Don't overlook the granted ability

a mantle provides. These powers can give you an important edge when the going gets tough. A granted power also lends some depth to your character concept.

Once you've chosen your first mantle, choose a second that supplements or complements the first in some way. You can also choose a second mantle based on what suits your character concept. For example, if you want to serve as mobile artillery for your group, your first mantle might be the energy mantle, which includes the powers *energy ray*, *energy push*, *energy bolt*, *energy burst*, *energy wall*, *energy manipulation*, and *energy wave*. You also gain a granted power that gives you some energy resistance (when you expend your psionic focus). These are potent combat powers, and the granted ability gives helps you to resist energy-based counterattacks. You can expand your offensive options with the destruction or mental power mantles. Alternatively, you might want a mantle that gives you useful options when you enter combat or maneuver before combat. Some excellent companions to your energy mantle include the element mantle (which includes offensive, defensive, and utilitarian powers) and the freedom mantle (which provides excellent mobility).

You can use the methods described here to choose your secondary mantles when you gain them.

Remember Your Friends

No matter what kind of ardent you create, working well with your friends improves your chances for success and survival. The mantles you choose will determine how you get the most from your relationship with your comrades.

The Party's Main Fighter: Whoever has to stand in the front line and handle most of the fighting acts as a bulwark against danger for the more vulnerable members of the party, and that includes you. You have a good Armor Class and a respectable hit point total, but a few rounds of spirited melee will ruin your day.

If your selection of powers is primarily offensive, be ready to support those characters with your powers in case they get into trouble. When manifesting your powers, aim them so your friends aren't caught in their destructive effects. Nothing wears out your welcome faster than poorly aimed effects that hurt friends as well as (or instead of!) foes.

If your mantles don't run to offense, look for other ways to support your party's fighting characters. If you can provide healing, be generous with it. Few, if any, powers you can manifest are as effective as a fighting peer. A fighting character also benefits from ability enhancements or effects that harass or hinder their foes.

With the right selection of mantles, you might be able to handle some fighting yourself. If so, look for ways to share some of your psionic effects with your allies. If you can shorten a battle by enhancing your allies, you are more likely to survive the fight. Plan to work with fighting characters to identify dangerous foes and eliminate them quickly.

The Party Scout: Stealthy characters such as rogues, rangers, and monks often get in over their heads, so expect to be part of the rescue party when necessary. These characters also are quite good at flushing out targets for your psionic effects.

If you're serving as a scout, don't take unnecessary risks and try not to range too far ahead of your allies.

Other Spellcasters and Manifesters: You probably have more hit points and a better Armor Class than any arcane spellcasters or psionic characters in your group. Try to stay close enough to these characters so that you can protect them if a foe breaks through the front line.

Whenever possible, make spellcasters aware of what powers you have at your command and encourage those characters to choose daily spells that fill the gaps in your power selection and avoid too much duplication. When working with other manifesters (or with spellcasters who don't prepare spells in advance), work out a plan ahead

of time for which character will use which power and when. For example, a massive volley of attack spells at the beginning of each fight probably is overkill and a waste of resources. It's more effective to divide up casting and manifesting tasks in some manner. A character with a high initiative bonus, for example, might loose an area attack. After that, other casters and manifesters can pick off the survivors.

Some Key Equipment

As an ardent, your gear is nearly as important as your spells, so don't neglect it. Here are some essentials --

- **Armor:** Plan to buy the best armor you can afford, and carry a heavy shield as well -- you'll never regret having a formidable Armor Class. Don't overlook other defensive items such as rings of protection and amulets of natural armor. Keep in mind that several lesser items stacked together give you better protection at a cheaper price than one big item.

You have access to defensive powers that can work almost as well as armor (at least for a short time). You can learn only a limited number of powers, however, and relying on defensive powers saps your daily allotment of psionic power points. You are better off treating your defensive powers as temporary augmentations to your defensive equipment.

If you do a lot of wilderness adventuring, consider some backup armor, such as a suit of studded leather (or a mithral chain shirt if you can afford it) to wear at night. If you sleep in heavy armor, you'll suffer penalties the next day. If you sleep in your skivvies, you'll suffer bigger penalties if you're attacked in the night. On the other hand, protecting yourself overnight is a great use for any defensive powers you might have, and the cash you save by not buying extra armor might be worth a few extra power points now and then.

- **Melee Weapon:** You're pretty good in combat, so be prepared to fight. A heavy mace or morningstar packs the most punch among the simple weapons you know how to use. A spear, however, is almost as effective and can prove useful for miscellaneous tasks, such as poking or probing surfaces. You also can throw a spear.
- **Ranged Weapon:** A light crossbow can be as effective as a low-level attack power against some opponents. Use it when necessary to conserve your power points and when the opposition isn't threatening enough to require manifesting a power. You might also consider a heavy crossbow. It's deadly but slow to reload. That reload time might not bother you too much, however, because you might find that manifesting a power or entering melee is more worthwhile than a second shot.
- **Backup Powers:** You never know when you'll run out of power points, and you never know when you'll need a particular power and need it very badly. It's hard to beat a cognizance crystal for keeping a few power points in reserve.

About the Author

Skip Williams keeps busy with freelance projects for several different game companies and was the Sage of *Dragon Magazine* for many years. Skip is a co-designer of the **D&D** 3rd Edition game and the chief architect of the *Monster Manual*. When not devising swift and cruel deaths for player characters, Skip putters in his kitchen or garden (rabbits and deer are not Skip's friends) or works on repairing and improving the century-old farmhouse that he shares with his wife, Penny, and a growing menagerie of pets.

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